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100 Ideas

The members of the Florida House are challenging all Floridians to help identify 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. These ideas will help build a government whose primary mission will be to insure that every Floridian will have the freedom and opportunity to achieve financial security and leave for their children a better life than their own.

The ideas will be collected and placed in a book called 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. The book will serve as a road map for Representatives as they craft policies for the future.

If you have ideas, please share them with me. We cannot write the book alone; we need to hear from you!

To receive our regular e-Leaflet mailings or to share your innovative ideas for Florida's future, please e-mail us at holly.benson@myfloridahouse.gov. We appreciate your input!

I LOVE Science

On June 13th, the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, Gulf Power, and State Representative Holly Benson launched Increasing Local Opportunities for Volunteers Enthusiastic about Science or I LOVE Science.

As more and more jobs in science and engineering are created overseas, as local businesses search for knowledge workers, we must begin to grow our own scientists.

Studies have shown that students with mentors are 73% more likely to raise their goals as a result of the relationship, 59% more likely to get better grades and 46% less likely to get involved with drugs.

We are looking for volunteers who are willing to give one hour per month for eight months to a 5th grade classroom in Escambia or Santa Rosa County. For more information, please contact Nancy Stanley at nstanley@escambia.k12.fl.us or Anita Holmes at holmesa@mail.santarosa.k12.fl.us.



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Health Care Appropriations

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SESSION 2006

F L O R I D A H O U S E O F R E P R E S E N T A T I V E S

Dear Neighbor,

This year the Legislature returned to Tallahassee prepared to help us not just continue to rebuild but rebuild better. Last year our community received dollars for our immediate needs, including rebuilding homes and funding shortfalls, and this year our task was to rebuild infrastructure, harden homes that have survived previous storms, and position our region for high-paying jobs.

In his final State of the State address, Governor Jeb Bush began with what has been his number one priority for 8 years: education. This year, the Legislature passed major education reforms to help students prepare for successful careers. The budget includes \$1.77 billion more for our schools—one of the single largest increases for K-12 education in Florida's history.

Because Florida's prosperity has meant record revenues in the state's coffers, we were able to return a significant portion of those dollars to you. We abolished the intangibles tax—*finally*, and provided more tax relief for thousands of Floridians through the Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday, Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday, and the Tax Exemptions on Energy Efficient Products.

We debated a number of major policy initiatives. In so doing, we:

- worked to make property insurance more affordable by passing legislation that will reform the property and casualty insurance market in Florida,
- limited government's ability from taking people's property by passing eminent domain legislation, and
- acted to protect Florida's businesses from frivolous lawsuits by eliminating joint and several liability and limiting liability only to percentage of fault.

Of particular significance to our community, we:

- committed to protect our bays, bayous and the Gulf by implementing environmental resource permitting,
- recognized that all homes—and not just those along the coast—need to be built to withstand hurricanes and asked the Florida Building Commission to update the building code to make our homes less vulnerable, and
- enhanced our evacuation routes and shelters available by tying increases in population density to increases in evacuation routes and shelters.

And to honor those who have helped make our community great, this year we passed legislation designating the future maritime museum in Pensacola as the "Admiral John H. Fetterman State of Florida Maritime Museum and Research Center" in honor of Jack Fetterman. We also designated the Cervantes Street Bridge over Bayou Texar as the Dr. Phillip A. Payne Bridge in recognition of Dr. Payne's tireless efforts to protect our Bayou.

As always, it is an honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Holly

Before the storm — Hurricane Preparedness

Just days into last year’s hurricane season, Hurricane Arlene sent the waves crashing into our shores. Dennis followed soon thereafter. Once again we returned to Tallahassee to address lessons learned from a devastating hurricane season.

Before Session began, the Governor appointed me to serve on the Coastal High Hazard Study Committee. We were tasked with reviewing how we best protect our coastline. The Committee made a number of recommendations that eventually became law, including:

- improving how we regulate coastal armoring and protecting our dune structures;
- requiring increased road capacity and shelter space when density increases; and
- fine-tuning our hazard maps so property owners know the risks of flood.

Cars lined up around the block waiting for fuel for weeks after each of the storms. We passed legislation that requires alternate generated power capacity at motor fuel outlets, creates the Florida Disaster Motor Fuel Supplier program and requires the Department of Community Affairs to compile lists of government-owned generators and private generator suppliers.

Because our most vulnerable frequently cannot find adequate shelter, we passed legislation to expand special needs registration outreach efforts, to address strategies to evacuate persons with pets, to monitor nursing homes and assisted living facilities during emergencies, and to

require local health departments and emergency management agencies to coordinate special needs shelter staffing and operations.

Too many local residents continue to struggle to find adequate property insurance, and they continue to try to minimize damage. The Legislature passed significant property and casualty insurance reform that protects homeowners and reforms Citizens by:

- offering substantial new financial incentives, up to \$5,000 per home, to help homeowners harden their homes against storms.
- allocating \$715 million to pay Citizens Property Insurance Companies’ outstanding debt in order to alleviate a 19.49% assessment on policyholders.
- restoring Citizens to its proper role as an insurer of last resort by requiring all homes valued at \$1 million or more to have private insurance by 2011; and
- offering numerous incentives for private insurers to write new policies in Florida.



Representative Benson and Governor Bush worked to help area residents rebuild and protect their homes from future storms.

Improving the grade — Education innovation

Building a world-class education system continues to be a top priority for the Legislature.

Since the implementation of the A+ Plan, there have been tremendous gains in student achievement. Before school accountability measures were put in place, only 21% of the state's schools received grades of either A or B. Now a full 68% of the state's schools are receiving those grades. The overall graduation rate has risen over 11%. 32% more students are doing math at or above grade level. 24% more students are reading at or above grade level. Under the A+ Plan, school funding has increased over 45%.

As we have worked with the A+ Plan, teachers, parents and students have identified ways to continue improving the system. In response to these suggestions,

this year the Legislature passed the A++ Reform Plan. The A++ Plan builds a strong middle school foundation through rigor and academic relevance by requiring 12 CORE credits for graduation. It establishes the Florida Ready to Work Certification Program, which offers students in career and technical education programs the opportunity to earn a Ready to Work Certificate based on assessment and instruction in workplace skills related to a specific career area. The bill specifies that school districts may require low performing students to attend extended day or summer remediation programs.

Technology continues to transform our education system, and we created a program to offer discounted computers and Internet access to students in grades 5 through 12 to give more students these essential tools.

This year per student funding increased in Escambia County by 8.96% and in Santa Rosa County by 9.27%.

A budget to rebuild. . . and build

The Legislature’s first responsibility is to pass a budget that reflects your priorities. This year’s budget includes significant increases for education, including money for local school districts to raise teacher salaries. The budget enhances our health care delivery system, funds major environmental and transportation projects and includes both savings for the future and \$300 million in tax relief for families and businesses.

Escambia County received \$12 million for the replacement of the Waste Water Treatment Plant in downtown Pensacola. When paired with the \$13 million previously secured from the state and the potential \$150+ million from FEMA, the Emerald Coast Utilities Authority is well on their way to making our vision of a new plant a reality.

As we continue to rebuild, we are also looking at how to grow our economy. In addition to UWF, for whom \$95,086,282 was appropriated and PJC, for whom \$48,673,808 was appropriated, our area is home to the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition and the Andrews Institute. The cutting-edge research done at these two institutions will continue to position our area as a health care center of excellence.

Local Budget Priorities	
Escambia County Schools	\$275, 702, 964
Santa Rosa County Schools	\$159, 258, 847
University of West Florida	\$95,086,282
Pensacola Junior College	\$48, 673, 808
Escambia Co. Transportation projects	\$68, 431, 042
Santa Rosa Co. Transportation projects	\$29,623,351
Main Street Waste Water Treatment Plant	\$12,000,000
Institute for Human and Machine Cognition	\$2,606,848
Andrews Institute of Orthopedic Science	\$2,500,000
Little Sabine Lagoon Restoration	\$1,000,000
City of Pensacola–Magee Field	\$200,000

Health Care — Front and Center . . .

At the beginning of the Session, the Health and Families Council which I Chair, organized a Health Transformation Summit. Our keynote speaker was former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, who now heads the Center for Health Transformation. Our Council organized the Summit in order to get more legislators and private-sector leaders engaged in the effort to transform our health care system. We were joined by doctors, hospital administrators, insurers, technology leaders, and patients as we talked about ways to improve this system.

One of the most important trends in health care is the implementation of electronic medical records. Having an electronic medical record will allow you to avoid filling out the same information again and again when you visit your doctors’ offices but more importantly it means that you can avoid unnecessary duplication of lab results, that we can avoid negative drug interactions and

that in cases of emergency your doctors and nurses will have information about your medical history at their disposal.

Many of Florida’s major health insurers are now offering electronic medical records; contact your insurer for more information. In addition, to help you choose the best providers and hospitals, the Legislature mandated the creation of www.floridacomparecare.gov which gives you current information on your hospitals, their prices and the outcomes at their facilities. And, to help you find pricing information for the 50 most commonly used prescription drugs in Florida, we also mandated the creation of www.myfloridארx.com.

Finally, the Legislature earmarked \$30 million to fund research initiatives on Alzheimer’s disease, brain tumors and cancer. These dollars will be essential in the fight against these diseases that continue to afflict our loved ones.



Newt Gingrich addresses the Florida House of Representatives during the 2006 session.